

Khyber Rifles

Khyber Rifles trace their origin to the Second Afghan War of 1878-79¹, the British initiated the establishment of the first political agency on the western frontier exclusively for the Khyber Pass, The Khyber Agency. An area within the Punjab province which was directly under the Foreign Secretary of India at Calcutta, pass had recently been taken over from the Afghanistan under the Treaty of Gandamak²{26th May 1879}. To protect this vital pass, Major Warburton raised Khyber Jazailchis³ along with Major Sardar Aslam Khan Saddozai; both served together for over eighteen years at Khyber, both were distant relatives to each other through a rare but labyrinth tale of love, lust, hate and respect among the British and Afghans. Afridis, Khyber Pass, Khyber Rifles, Colonel Warburton and Colonel Sardar Aslam Khan all have now become synonym. Khyber Rifle were raised as an irregular Khyber Jezailchis{Jezail stands for local manufactured rifle}. Comprising of two companies in which one was composed of Malik Din Khel Afridi and other from Zakkha Khel Afridi. The Rifles itself draws its name from the famous pass thus the history of the Rifles is in fact the history of the Pass, history of the tribes inhabiting it and the international relations between the British India and the Afghanistan as part of Great Game in the past and between Pakistan and Afghanistan now.

Khyber Pass is the most natural way of movement between the Kabul-Peshawar-Lahore-Delhi and onwards to Calcutta in east and towards the Central Asia on west. Pass itself starts almost ten miles west of Peshawar with Jamrud as the base town and then gradual climb with a swindling track{presently FWO is constructing road which is built till Ali Masjid}. Population is thin on both sides of road, barren void of water and generally dry. The present day road journey despite the under construction road does not take more than two hours to cross. The ever present long Mercedes trailers coming from Kabul carrying goods and military hardware of NATO, non-custom paid vehicles, lone bus service between Kabul and Peshawar is the only daily direct link, and many other vehicles keep it busy from sunrise to sunset. The pass itself has remained open since 9/11 which is a great achievement on part of Khyber Rifles, this by itself is an evidence of the pass's history and divergent culture. In an era when all other passes along Pakistan –Afghan frontier have remained closed for one reason or the other, Khyber Pass contrary despite being so vital and being so close to the heart of current wave of militancy has remained open.⁴ Closing Khyber Pass is like closing down the link between the Indus Civilisation and Oxus River, between present and past, between modernisation and primitiveness, between liberalism and fundamentalism; It is through Khyber that civilisation meet and interact.

Since 1836 when the Sikhs were defeated at Ali Masjid till now the landmarks all along the track have hardly altered with the exception of two, one the house or killa of Haji Ayub Afridi who was once rated as the most honest and hospitable drug smuggler of his time, he also had the distinction of firing a shot at Nehru during his speech at Peshawar in 1946; Ayub was a khassadar then. Other is the Miri Mosque where a blast in 2009 killed over 92 tribesmen, mosque has been built

¹ Muhammad Nawaz *Guardians of Frontier*, {Frontier Corps, Peshawar, 1996} pp.61-88

² Dr Azmat Hayat *Durand Line Its Geostrategic Importance*, {Area study Centre, University of Peshawar, Hans Seidal Foundation, 2005} p, 120

³ *Imperial Gazetteer North Western Province*, 1905, Government of India, {reprinted by Sang Meel Lahore 2001}, p-232.

⁴ Khyber Pass at Torkham is rarely closed due to any threat, it is administrative in nature.

new. This is the turning point in the modern history of the Pass. The most important landmark on the Khyber is Ali Masjid, the tradition goes that Hazrat Ali came here and built a mosque, opposite the mosque is a huge boulder believed to be thrown by Hazrat Ali; yet the population is entirely composed of Sunni faith.

Khyber Pass itself came into limelight due to 1st Afghan War of 1839. The British East Indian troops did not march through it rather they opted for the Kandahar {Bolan Pass} but their retreat and relief was through Khyber Pass and that is how Khyber Pass and Khyber Rifles became synonym .

Khyber Rifles{KR} has the oldest and one of the most chequered history among all the corps of Frontier Corps{FC}. They are the oldest component of FC, raised in 1879 as an irregular tribal force comprising of some 300 odd Afridi tribesmen with a single aim to keep the historic pass open year around and to ensure the safe passage of caravans and more importantly the British army for its subsequent operations against Afghanistan. When the occasion arrived in 1919 with the start of Third Afghan War the soldiers deserted en masse resulting in the disbandment of the corps. It was raised again in 1941 as Afridi Battalion and took part in the war mainly carrying out protective duties in the rear. It was again disbanded in 1946 at Sialkot and Khyber Rifles were re-raised at the same station and stationed at their home town of Landi Kotal where they are present till now. It took part in the 1965 Pakistan-India war and was awarded a sitara-e-jurat, it had its share of action in the 1971 Pakistan-India War mainly on eastern front. Till the start of war against terror in 2001 it was mainly occupied in keeping peace on the border and quelling the odd miscreant in the agency; which had gained notoriety in drugs all over the world. However since 2005 when Frontier Corps came under operational control of army the Khyber Rifles have been busy all over the tribal areas in hunting the terrorists in collaboration with other corps and army. In the process no less than sixty scouts have embraced shahadat and over two hundred have been injured.

Khyber Rifle's main fame is in its holding and guarding the historic pass Khyber, and being a host to a galaxy of native and foreign dignitaries who visit the pass they range from field marshals', emperors, crown princes, queens, generals, admirals, sportsmen, actors, clergy, writers , premiers, presidents, air marshals', politicians to name few.

Why early civilization developed remains difficult to explain⁵, however as a starting point it is assumed that the agricultural revolution took birth almost 15000 years ago, at about ten thousand years ago there existed a civilization on the banks of the River Nile and Euphrates and probably on River Indus and Yellow ,out of these four the physical evidence or the historiography of the Nile and Euphrates is most reliable for the fact that Indus Civilization was not discovered till 1922 whereas the Nile and Euphrates had their history preserved almost from antiquity. It is in lower Mesopotamia however and in Egypt that there first appear cities, temples, systematic irrigation, and evidences of a social organization rising above the level of a mere barbaric village-town... the great history of Egypt was beginning.⁶

The Khyber Pass has a history of its own and it is the most famous of all the passes that leads to Indus Valley from the highlands of Central Asia; it is the gateway to the India and present day Pakistan. In old time the word India was mainly used for the Indus Valley, Persians called it India ,

⁵ World History, spielvogel,p- 12

⁶ A Short History of the World ,H. G. Wells New York The Macmillan & Company 1922 , Chapter XV

the natives called it as Sindhu {Sanskrit}. Indus valley was under the Persian control from 500 BC , it was one of the twenty satrapies of Darrius and the Taxila was the most rich among all these, other being the present day Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Baluchistan, Kafiristan to name few. There is no record of the past available in India when it is compared with other old civilization of Egypt and China. Rig Veda is an oral history which narrates the history of Aryans, who migrated from the highlands towards the plains as part of historical current, in search of better dwellings, they logically followed the water channels leading east which includes River Gilgit in the north north west followed by River Kabul, River Tochi and River Zhob all thus acting as passes . Apart from these water passes the other passes that connects the west-east are Mintaka, Broghul, Nawagai, Khyber, Tirah, Kurram to name few, but none has attained the glamour, charisma, romance, importance and has caused as much **convulsion** as Khyber Pass . India's history in a sense starts with Herodotus's Historia in which he mentioned the social life pattern of Indus , but the fact is that he never came physically towards this part thus his all accounts are based upon secondary sources. There is always a watermark in the history and to great extent our history starts with the Alexander the Great's invasion of India in 323 BC for the reason that he brought along with him a batch of historians to record the events but unfortunately nothing has even survived of that in true sense. It was Arrian who almost three hundred years after Alexander's death wrote the history of his sojourn in India {70AD} thus even Arrian account cannot be taken with full authenticity. India after Alexander's retreat was divided among his generals with three major centres of importance emerging namely the Kabul in West, Taxila in the centre and Magdha in the east on Ganges, other important towns like Multan in south on Chenab and Peshawar on Kabul river in north assumed greater importance due to the east-west movement; for the purpose of Khyber Rifles we are more concerned with area west of Indus thus Peshawar is the key town.

Sakas ,Parthians and Pahlavas were all inter related to each other, whereas Sakas are believed to be coming from the Bactria the Parthians are believed to be Persian tribes, their route of invasion are also debatable with scholars citing the either Bolan or Khyber Passes as the likely routes along with Kashmir ⁷. The invaders were not restricted to the old armies of the Greek and Persia but the Chinese tribes of Yeuh-Chi also had their share they were known as Khushanas or Kanishke. They were in power over the north western part of India the present day north Pakistan between from 78 AD onwards till 260 AD, they had Kashmir {Ki-Pin}Bactria{Ta-Hia} Kabul{Kao-Fu} and India{Tien-Chu under their suzerainty, The rising power of the Persian Sassanian under Ardashir led to Kushans downfall , Sassanian were soon in control of the Balkh, Merv and Khorasan. Thus the Sassanian were having the rule over Western India including Makran and Sind, in Punjab independent feudatories were established by the Kushan chiefs namely Shilada ,Shaka and Ghadara clans apart from having seat of power in the Peshawar

Islam took birth in 570 AD at Arabia and within a short span of time it changed the history of present day Iran, Afghanistan, Central Asia and India. By 712 AD when Islamic forces were knocking on the doors of India, the first major onslaught came from south through the sea and land adjoining it in a easterly direction from Iran and after defeating the Hindu raja close to the ancient town of Moen jo Daro it halted at Multan. On the north the Islamic forces defeated the joint military joint of Turk and Chines in 751 AD. Turk was a word which the Arabs used for all nomadic tribes of Central Asia;

⁷ Foreign influence on Ancient India, K.C.sagar{Northern Book Centre, New Delhi, 1992}, p-121-122. History of Ancient Iran Volume 3 Part 7, Richard Frye{Ballantine, Colchester, 1984} p-178.. Ancient India Social History some interpretations{Orient longman, Hyderabad, 1979} p-157

with this battle the Chinese and Turk empires not only were crushed but they embraced Islam especially the Turks in en masses and that had a profound impact on the Khyber Pass and other tribes

Tribes living astride the Hindu Kush are descendants of the same Aryan stock which migrated from the Central Asia and many kept on moving towards the east of Indus and adopted agricultural life style and other preferred to live astride the river banks and passes. They all are invariably interlink with each other in one way or the other, with minor difference of origin. After the Greek came White Huns, Kashans, Sakas, Yeu -Hu

The name Khyber thus has its history interlink with the early days of Islam. Battle of Khyber near Medina is one of the most famous ghazwa of that era and Hazrat Khalid bin Waleed stands out as the most coveted and successful general of Islam. The oral native history thus claims to have a direct link with these two names, they accepted Islam on the hands of Khalid bin Waleed and that is how the name Khyber was adopted. In another such local oral history the famous Ali masjid which is the narrowest part of the pass is named after the conqueror of 'Khyber of Medina'; Hazrat Ali, the mosque is named after him. On the other hand it is very much logical to assume that the Islam spread with the conversion of Turks into this area. No Arab Islamic army came through this pass.

Qutaibah ibn Muslim between 710-715 conquered the Central Asia especially the Bactria and Ferghana valley the heart land of the Turks, Samarkand and Bukhara came under Muslim rule in 715, these Turks were nomadic tribes originating from the Mongolian steppes. In 751 AD a decisive battle between the Muslims and the Turks who also had the support of the Chinese army as well put not only routed Turks but also put an end to the Chinese rule in the area for another thousand years. Turks established the first Islamic dynasty in Central Asia under the name of Samanids. By 1100 AD an Islamic state was established in India with capital at Delhi under the Turk sultans; the real history of Khyber starts from now.

By the end of first millennium the area astride Indus as far as Kabul was in an anarchy with no single power having authority, Hindu rajas were in control of Kabul, Peshawar, and Bannu rather the upper Dikhsahan was under their sway. The tide turned when the Turks after embracing Islam established the Muslim state at Ghazna and soon they defeated the Hindu rajas and when the Great Mahmood of Ghazna ascended the throne he practically reduced the whole of India as vassal state of Ghazna

For next three centuries the invaders like Chengiz Khan and Tamerlane passes through this range and pass and finally it was Babur of Ferghana who in 15th century crossed the pass and established the Mughul rule in India. Babur and his descendents have one unique quality they all almost wrote autobiography and biography which sheds light on the history of this pass. Mughul rule had its roots in central Asia and thus Pass became important, many attempts were made to have it properly secure under its control but they all partially succeeded, insurgency and rebellions were faced by them and till the end of this empire in 18th century the tussle continued. It was Akbar the Great's engineer Qasim Khan who is attributed with constructing the road on Khyber which was fit enough for vehicular traffic in 1581.

In 1739 invasion of India was carried out by Persian Nadir Shah who naturally adopted the southern passes of Kandahar but decided to move westward after ravaging Delhi through the Khyber Pass, he met stiff resistance in the pass and although in the subsequent rule of Ahmed Shah Abdalli the Kabul had its authority extended till the Sutlej River having Peshawar, Lahore, Kashmir and

Multan under its control ; yet the Khyber Pass was never under the Kabul's control , it was free and belonged to the Afridis . Ahmed Shah died in 1773 and succeeded by his son Timur Shah who ruled peacefully for another twenty years till when he died in 1793. It was he who constructed the post which is now infamous as the Tamerlane prison; it is precisely at the same defile where the Mughul massacre took place almost a hundred years ago

British East India Company{BEIC} a commercial venture were initially content with the dominion in the east but the threat of Napoleon in 1800 onwards compelled them to plunge into the western affairs, treaty with Persians in 1805 and then the Russian invasion's fear forced them to have a puppet regime in Kabul and this is how the First Afghan War in 1838 started which was mainly to restore Herat to the loyal Shah Shuja of Kabul. They opted to have the forces march towards the south of Afghanistan from the southern most pass of India the Bolan. The expedition succeeded in its mission and a regency was established in Kabul but all hell broke loose in 1842 when the regency was attacked, burnt and almost all the members of British contingent were massacred with the sole exception of Dr Brydon who was able to drag himself into the Jelalabad garrison manned by British troops while coming back from Kabul; Khyber in true sense now became the life savior blood line for the British and Khyber Pass was the key . before venturing into the history from this point onward it is pertinent to have a look at the Khyber pass geography and demography.

Khyber Pass

Physically the pass has a length of 33 miles extending from Jamrud which is eight miles west of Peshawar having an elevation of 1900 feet, traversing westward through a gradual ascent amidst barren and rocky mountains in a continuous slow and gradual climb passing through Shagai which is at 3000 feet elevation and then the narrowest part of pass at Ali masjid couple of miles west of Shagai, again opening up and reaching Landai Kotal which is at 3500 feet and the highest point of the pass it is a plateau and from here a descent starts which takes a traveller down to Michni and into Landai Khanna which marks the culmination point of the pass ; eight miles west of Landai Kotal.

Khyber Pass is inhabited by one major and most populous tribe the Afridis from Jamrud till Landai Kotal , which is also the home of Shinwaris another Pathan tribe which extends into Afghanistan. Afridis are restricted into the east of pass. Two minor tribes Shillman and Mullagori are also living north of the pass. The Kabul River marks the northern boundaries of the pass.

Pass itself can be classified into three main portions from east the initial part from Jamrud – Shagai with Baghiari defile overlooking the entrance it is known as lower Khyber , from Shagai-Landai Kotal is the central Khyber and then from Landai Kotal –Landai Khanna as the lower Khyber.

Geographically the northern area between the Kabul river when it enters into the plains of Peshawar till the southern part where it joins river Indus near Attock is a large curve , just like a moon in its mid phase. The southern part known as the Kohat{presently Khushal Bridge}moving west and northward it is inhabited by eight clans of Afridis. The midpoint of this curve or moon is the Tirah Valley which is green and has an elevation of 6000 feet. This curve encompasses the valley of Bara River which has its origin in Tirah and logically even Peshawar is part of the Afridi clan as it falls west of River Kabul; therefore the east-west movement has to pass through this moon and there are two major passes the Tirah pass and Khyber Pass. Going through the pages of history one has recorded the countless invaders going through them, surprisingly there are no ancient ruins along the Khyber pass to validate this claim. At Landai Kotal which is the plateau , logic demands to have the

ancient or even Mughul era structures in the form of fort and garrison but surprisingly there is no such landmarks left by the past rulers which by itself negates the very concept of this pass being the artery of past. If Mughuls can construct fort at Attock { } then sheer absence of such in the pass or even at the mouth of pass on both end is highly conspicuous and open to debate, which will continue to remain in focus for times to come. There is only one ancient ruin between Ali Masjid and Landai Kotal, a Buddhist Stuppa which is 25 feet in height and still have certain marks of ancient language, the myth is that it was built during the reign of Asoka {310 -232 BC} but it has never been examined technically to have scientific evidence of its age, no ancient marks of civilization. One most logical answer is the absence of water on the western mouth of pass thus old caravans tend to follow the River Kabul to reach into Peshawar having water all along. Old historians and biographers have use a variety of words for the same pass thus it seems that when the word Khyber is used then it speaks of the area between the Landai Khanna – Shilman on west and the ridge line from Jamrud-Shilman on the east.

Taking oral history as the yard stick the overall complex of history changes and one hears of fierce battles conducted at almost every stone of the pass. Among all the old names the name Kafir Kot stands out, it is the ridge which primarily runs south of the pass overlooking it till the Torkham. Its peaks do have strands of past, the name itself is linked with the Kafiristan, a province of Afghanistan in past now Nuristan but within Pakistatn's Chitral district a tribe still exists having Kafiristan and known as kafir.

The pass and Afridis have become synonym to each other, Afridi is also an Aryan tribe, it have eight clans and among them following habitats Khyber and adjoining areas, Kuki Khel, Zakka Khel, Kambar Khel, Malik Din Khel, Sipah, Shalobar, Aka Khel. The other tribes of Khyber are Shinwari, Mullagori and Shilman but they are on the northern side and even among them only Shinwari are in great strength but still no match to Afridi. One thing in common among all of them is that they all are Muslims and practice Sunni fiqh.

Khyber Rifles

It was in early 1881 that a full jirga of afridi clan was held at Peshawar in which the independence of the tribe was recognized and allowances agreed {rupees 85,860 for the Khyber afridis}, government to take the toll and clan to provide the force for maintaining order and paece on the pass⁸. This force was Khyber Jezailchi which comprised of native Khyber afridis and paid by the British. Khyber rifles initially ahda strength of 400 footmen and 48 mounted on nhorse, later it increased to 550 in 1881, having one officer; sardar aslam Khan Saddozai, he in turn was under command of the political mofficer of Khyber rifles which f almost eighteen years was Colonel Warburton. Thus the first twenty years of Rifles history is a history of these two men who led, reorganize and expanded the Khyber Jezailchis. The natives used to call it Sur lakkai {red tail}⁹ for the reason that thre Jezailchis wore the native dress but a as a mark of distinction they would put on a red cloth on their turban thus the nick anme. In other words it was a levies because they were not issued

⁸ Colonel H.C. wyllly from the Black Mounatin to Waziristan, first edition, 1912, reprint. Sang e Meel publishers, Lahoire, 2003, pp-184-185.

⁹ Colonel sir George Warburton, eighteen years in the Khyber 1879-1898, first published 1900, reprint, sang e meel, 2007, p-94.

with any government rifles and only free action was admissible the pay being paid directly to the clans under silladari system.

The very first operation in which this outfit was employed was in Bazar area {zakka Khel} and they did well. The role of them was more of a scout leading the way for the British regular army units and keeping the pass open mostly from their own clans. In 1890 the government in recognition of their service and as a mark of trust started issuing them the official rifles.

Railways, Road & Forts .

After experiencing the difficulties and other obstacles during 1st and 2nd Afghan War, the English felt the need of laying the Rail Track in the area. They prepared a plan for the same in 1889. The work was started in 1906 after completing the survey but was abandoned after spending a lot of money. In view of the defence needs and importance of the track, the work was again started. It was finally completed in 1925 at a total cost of 210 million rupees. The track was inaugurated on 21st November 1925.

A Railway train runs from Peshawar to Landi Khana. The length of Railway line from Peshawar to Landi Khana is approximately 31 Miles. It is a marvelous feat of engineering with its 92 bridges and culverts and has 34 tunnels enroute. The track is a monument of modern science age. Jamrud, Shagai, Landikotal and Landi Khana are the main stations on the Railway line. . (Total length of tunnels is about 3 miles)

The road was built in 1921. In fact there are two roads running parallel to each other. The north Khyber road is a first class metal led road and is used by motor transport. The south Khyber Road is shingle road and it's used by Carvans.

Khyber Pass is the artery of civilisations which flow with the flow of water. Here Kabul River enters into the plains by flowing through Hindukush in a gentle manner. Kabul has Water of Turch Mir & Pamirs and with it came Aryans 2000BC from the northern highlands, then came Alexander the Great 323 BC and he also opted this , but he came from the south , Greece, Nile, Tigris, Mesopotamia, Persia up till Amu Darya and then to Khyber Pass. he thus brought a collection of all known civilisation, artists, writers, warriors, women whose intelligence & beauty was the best. Alexander never actually went through this pass but his followers opted this pass .

Khyber pass is thirty miles in length from west-east, as one is coming with flow of Kabul River then almost fifteen miles northwest the Kabul river takes a northerly bend and then after another fifteen miles passes through Hindukush. And another fifty miles before it joins Indus River. However at the first bend a small stream also joins it which is going down from Torkham, if the traveller or invader wants to reach Indus then he can walk/ride these thirty odd miles in a night but by following Kabul River it cannot cross HinduKush in one night; thus Khyber Pass became a pass for invaders and Kabul river for trade; this is still how it is now even.

They then settled down along the pass as it became the artery of civilisations. These are now known as Afridi, out of the eight clans the two who lives astride it Kukki Khel & Zakha Khel are the most numerous, Kuki holds the eastern mouth and Zakkha Khel the western. Shinwaris are on the northern edge in majority confronting Zakkha khels, the Shilman and Mullagori , all these five are collectively known as Khyberis. They have the best of everything, good honourable men, liberal, realistic, most prosperous traders. Shakespeare of Pashtu, Hamza Shinwari is buried here, he is to Khyber what Robert Burns is to Scotland. As late as in 1957 they shot travellers/foreigners for taking pictures of them without permission. These two clans Kuki Khel & Zakha Khel have the lion's share

in world's drug market. Zakha Khel cultivates poppy and Kuki Khel process it and smuggle it to any where in world . Haji Ayub Afridi Kuki khel is a legend in his own way, as a khasadar he fired on Nehru in Peshawar in 1946 and then emerged as the king of heroin, today there is a village named after him; Ayub Afridi cannot be termed as criminal in any sense because he fought his case in USA by going there on his own and won a clean chit.

For last ten days i am trying to understand Khyber Pass, and now i come to conclusion in this artery of civilisation, here one finds craftsmen of every nature, weapon makers are others who are settled in the Kuki khel area.

Landi kotal is another interesting phenomena, it is the serai of civilisation but only for a halt , because there is no water here, water is only at Charbagh, thus in fact Charbagh is the oldest habitat here and not Landi Kotal. On eastern end water is available at Ali Masjid therefore Landi Kotal is a no man's land or Plataeu and this position is intact even today. In reality Afridis used to held the Kabul River mouth which is fifteen miles north of Landi Kotal under them but as the area is almost non irrigable therefore they took it lightly and were soon compromised. Afridis were driven back from the Kabul river mouth by the Arabs in 751 AD, Arabs opted the Loi Shalman approach and surprised the Zakha Khel by holding the Landi Kotal plataeu. with the Shinwari which is more of western tribe. Even today Shinwaris are more religious oriented, they had a Qadri Khugga Khel Shinwari as MNA in 2008 elections. Zakha Khel have a story where they killed a pious man just to have a mazar in their area because they were always consiuos of lacking a pious tomb in their area.

Afridis now do not have any clan north of Landi Kotal and shinwari or no other non afridi tribe is settled southy of watershed, the water belongs to Afridis. Thus in old civilisation the water dispute forced Shinwaris to have a peace with Afridis .Similar act was done in 1966 when Afghanistan conceded Pakistan area west of Durand Line at Torkham , west of Kabul River and gaining same advantage at River Chitral gorge in north. If one looks at the Landi Kotal drawing one can make it out like a Right Foot, with toe as Landi Kotal and middle finger as Michni, which thus acts as a post for Shinwaris in old time. The present day military garrison which was established in 1850 onwards is in Shinwari area.Thus Shinwaris balanced their numerical inferiority by having the military providing them the security.

Now these five clans are called Khyberis which can be termed like a EEC of present, G8 or Big Five.